



## **Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection**

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**Summary**  
**"You Just Survived Because You Had To"**  
**Margot Heuman**  
**February 21, 2013**

In 1943 Margot Heuman left the German town of Bielefeld on a passenger train to Theresienstadt. Along with her parents and her sister, she spent a year living in the ghetto before they were all sent to Auschwitz in 1944. Margot only spent about six weeks in Auschwitz before she was sent to a German labor camp, along with her friend Dita. When Margot left Auschwitz, that was the last time she saw her family. She spent the rest of the war with Dita, determined to survive. About a month before she was liberated, Margot and Dita were marched from Hamburg to Bergen-Belsen. Margot got sick and nearly died in Bergen-Belsen, but was liberated by the British and sent to Sweden to rehabilitate. She was taken in by a Swedish woman who helped her go to school and get better. In 1948 Margot came to the US because she had family in New York, and she began taking English classes and making a life for herself in America.

**"You Just Survived Because You Had To"**

**Margot Heuman**

**February 21, 2013**

"Let me tell you this, if you actually lived through it, it's not as bad as it is to you looking at it. You just survived because you had to survive."

*Interviewer: Care to tell about where you grew up?*

Margot: I was born in a small village in Germany. I don't remember why, but my parents moved to Bielefeld, which is near Hanover, a town in Northern Germany. I think it was due to Hitler.

My father worked for a Jewish organization, Hilfsverein für Deutschen Juden, which means something like "Self-Help for German Jews." We stayed until we were the last family to leave Bielefeld. That was in '43. I think it was in May. Now the day before we left, I have to tell you this story. A young man came to our house; his father was a minister. He came to deliver some kind of message for my father, and apparently I opened the door. I had this big medicine ball that's over there. It was in my hands, and my father said, "Why don't you give this ball to this boy to keep for you until you come back?" And he kept that ball all these years, and he gave it back to me a couple of years ago.

*How did you guys reconnect?*

We reconnected because the town, Bielefeld, had survivors, so they sponsored a trip.

*And was he still living there?*

No. He later moved on to Bremen, and we are good friends now. His daughter and my daughter Jill know each other, and his granddaughter came and stayed with me for a few weeks last year.

*That's amazing*

Yeah!

*And did you remember the ball all these years?*

No, no. I just remembered it vaguely. He remembered it all. He also turned out to be a minister, and he taught the Holocaust to his Sunday school kids with the ball.

*So how old were you when your family moved?*

I was about 15 or 16.

*What happened next?*

We went on a passenger train to Theresienstadt. It wasn't a cattle car. It was a regular train.

*This is 1942?*

It was towards the end of '43. I think Spring, but I don't remember exactly.

*Do you remember anything about that transition?*

I was happy to go because I couldn't do anything anymore. I had to wear the Jewish Star. I had no friends. I had nothing. I was happy to get out of there.

*Did you know anything about where you were going?*

No, I had no idea. But there was a rude awakening when we got there. Even so, the camp itself, compared to all the other camps, was heaven.

*Do you remember anything about those first days?*

I remember arriving, and we were put in this huge hall with I don't know how many other people. We had straw mattresses and I got all kinds of fleas and infected bites. I was really miserable, but my parents got my sister and me into the youth home. She was three years younger than I. Once I got there, I didn't mind being there. You know, I lived in one room with 24 other girls my own age.

*Like summer camp?*

Yeah, well we also had to work. We were hungry, but they did give us special food. We got milk, and every Friday because it was Shabbat, we got this little cake with a little chocolate sauce on it. I remember the milk, and we used to beat it up so it was more filling. I worked there, and then I went out and worked in the farm outside the ghetto.

*That was on a daily basis?*

As far as I remember, yes. We used to eat raw spinach and stuff like that. And I love opera and my first opera was in Terezin. And there were so many Jewish people. I think it got worse later on, but while I was there, except for being hungry, I was not abused. It wasn't summer camp but it was okay. I visited my parents, and I met my friend Dita. Her name is Edith but I call her Dita. She died recently in Toronto but we were friends our whole lives, and we stayed together from beginning to end.

*Were you able to celebrate the holidays and Shabbat in any way?*

Yes we did. We even had school- there were Jewish teachers. We had school, and we were ardent Zionists, everybody there was. Now later on everything changed.

I remember everybody in the room got encephalitis. You got stiff arms so everybody was in the hospital, so I decided I wanted to go to the hospital. I remember this: I used to rub the thermometer and put my arms out like they were stiff. I went to the hospital, and my poor mother was standing outside trying to talk to me and worried that I was sick.

*You just wanted to be with your friends?*

Yeah. Everything ended because my father worked in the Post Office, and he was caught stealing food. Now I don't blame anyone who steals food when they are hungry. He had to go on a transport to Auschwitz, and my mother said, "If he goes, we all go."

*Did you have any idea what was going there? Was there any news?*

No, we had no idea. We had no idea.

Oh, I have to tell you about one more thing. This woman went to Theresienstadt with us. Her name was Anneliese Jonas. She was my father's secretary. She fell madly in love with this Dr. Freudenthaler who was married to a Christian woman and even had two kids. I was a teenager- I was 12, 13, or 14- and this love affair, boy! I was sworn to secrecy, and I let them stay in my room. I watched over them in Bielefeld. Dr. Freudenthaler volunteered to go to Theresienstadt with Anneliese, so all of us left together. He was there maybe a month and he was sent on a children's transport. She volunteered to go with him, and they went right into the gas chambers in Auschwitz with about 500 kids. I remember this woman. There are certain things that are part of me.

*Did you tell anyone?*

No! Not about their love affair.

*Did a lot of people know each other ahead of time?*

Jewish people?

*Yeah, Jewish people.*

My family was fairly religious- we went to the temple, we went to Hebrew school. So we knew everybody while they were still in Bielefeld. But a lot of people got out. There was a quota. My parents tried to get out but there was a German quota, and if you didn't have a sponsor or lots of money you couldn't do it.

*You mentioned your family was religious. In Terezin were people most people?*

I would say more nationalistic or Zionist rather than religious.

*When your family left Terezin, did they know where they were going?*

No. We didn't know anything. We had no idea.

*How long were you in Terezin?*

Only about a year. And then we went to Auschwitz in '44.

*Could you tell us a little bit about what life was like there?*

Well first of all, I had formed a very close friendship with my friend Dita. She wasn't going to Auschwitz, so I was utterly miserable. I mean I was really miserable. We went to Auschwitz in the kind of cars you've seen. You know the cattle cars. And we were probably about 40 people in the car. And the trip lasted... I'm not quite sure how long it lasted. I don't remember, but I know there was a bucket for a toilet, and I know that I didn't go. I was sitting there crying the whole time, making my parents miserable. And then we arrived in Auschwitz and we went to Birkenau, which was a family camp. And we did not have, like some people say, "You go here. You go there." The whole transport went right to Birkenau. So they didn't separate anyone, except my father went into the men's barrack. My mother and my sister and I went into the women's barrack. And we had bunk beds, three, four, five stories, I forget.

*How far apart were they? Could you move at all, or were you packed in tight?*

I had my own bed, I know that. I was on top. I have no idea how far I was from anyone else.

*Do you know how old your parents were at the time?*

My father was born in 1898, and this was in the '40's. And my mother was born in 1902, so they were not that old. My sister was three years younger than I.

*Were men, women and children separated all the time?*

Separate barracks all the time. Not in Terezin, my parents lived together.

*In Auschwitz, did you ever get to see your father?*

Oh I saw my father. We were able to walk around during the day. I was only in Auschwitz for six weeks. That's all. That's when I was separated from my parents. My mother was able to get us into the children's home. I was one of the older ones, and I was there to take care of the little ones. And my sister was there. We didn't get much to eat. We had one plate of soup and one slice of bread, and that was it every day. So we were hungry, always hungry. But even in Auschwitz, I never was physically abused.

*Did you see that going on with other people?*

No, not in the youth home. But we had all these little kids who had lost contact with their parents and it was really heartbreaking.

Then ten days later, Dita came. Her grandma had been transferred to Auschwitz, and she and her aunt volunteered. So we met again in the youth home, and then we stayed together until the end.

*What was the average day like?*

We both worked with small children. We got up in the morning, and we helped the little kids get dressed and we played with them. I think about noon we got the soup and the bread, and that was the main meal of the day. And we just hung out.

*How did you pass the time? What did you do for fun?*

Well, we used to make plans of what we would do when we got out. But that's about all. And we used to play games of mental telepathy, but that's about it.

*What about the adults? What was your parents' day-to-day like?*

I don't know. I think my mother worried about us, but my mother and father and I saw each other every day. And I visited with my sister. And that's about it. I'm not sure about the time, but we were there approximately six weeks.

Oh, I have a number from Auschwitz.

*What number is it?*

A1712.

*Was there a daily accounting of everybody?*

Not in the youth home. Well, we did have to stand outside, but when we were with little kids, they didn't bother with the little children.

*Did they give you a number right when you got there?*

Shortly after.

*Did everybody get one? Even the little kids?*

I don't remember.

*Did everyone in there have a number?*

The adults did. This is a number from my transport. Other people had different numbers- some had longer numbers.

*Did that ever come up when people were talking to each other? Or did they try to ignore it?*

They ignored it. It wasn't important. It didn't even hurt to get the tattoo.

*These days do you ever feel the need to cover the number up?*

When I go to Germany I cover it up. I just don't want to be bothered. I don't want people to start talking, and I just don't want to be bothered. Otherwise I don't. And I have cousins in Germany because one of my mother's sisters had been married to a Catholic. They were all baptized but it didn't really do any good because the mother was Jewish, so they went into hiding and they all survived. So I still have cousins now in Germany.

*So do you go to visit a lot?*

Not often, but once every two years or so. I don't have too much family, you know.

*What time of year was it when you were in Auschwitz?*

It was, I think, in the late spring. April or May.

*How long were you there total?*

Close to six weeks, but I don't know exactly, because then they had a transport. We didn't know what it was. We thought we might be going to the gas chamber- by then we knew about them. Anyhow, all the young people had to line up and they said "you, you, you, you." My mother could have come but my sister couldn't, so she stayed with my sister. I don't know what we thought it was then, but I didn't think about the gas chamber. I thought it was a new adventure. My friend Dita went, and her aunt, so I had some people that I knew with me. I remember marching out of the camp, and my father was standing in front of his barrack, and I went over to him and he blessed me, and it was the first time I saw my father cry. There are certain things I remember. And then when we marched out of the camp, it turned out that we were with people who were loaded with food. Oh, I have to tell you this. My mother insisted that I eat her soup. It meant she had no food for the day. And then I went with these people, and I still feel guilty about that now. I went with these people, and they had all these delicacies, and I don't know how they got them.

*They were also coming from inside the camp?*

All coming from the camp. Basically, all Czech people. I was with all Czech people because Terezin was in what was Czechoslovakia. And we had to eat all the food because it was going to be taken away, so they shared it. So we were eating candies and sugar and... unbelievable.

*Did you get sick?*

No, that time I didn't. Then we had to go into showers. So we were not sure what it was, you know? Were they really real showers? They took all of our clothes away, and we had a



physical exam by a doctor, and then I was sent out with a prisoner uniform- you know that blue and white striped uniform- and they didn't give us any underwear.

Then they put us outside in this big arena, and we all had to gather to get together. I was there before my friend Dita. Dita was still in the line to take a shower, and I saw that, and we knew by then that it was okay. So I lifted my dress up, I showed her, "I have a dress but no underwear!"

When everybody had been showered and examined and given this uniform, we were put on a train, again, a cattle car. And we went to Hamburg. Into a labor camp, and that's where I spent most of my war years.

*What type of labor were you doing?*

First we were outside of Hamburg and we worked. We went on the Elba River every morning at five in the morning by boat to an asbestos factory. I don't even remember what we did there, but we worked in there. And then in the evening we went back, and we were in these cabins. It wasn't bad. We still didn't have enough food, but it wasn't bad. We had German soldiers, rather than SS, watching over us. One soldier said I reminded him of his daughter, and he gave me part of his lunch every day, which I shared with Dita. We used to pick mushrooms, and we didn't really know much about them, but we never got poisoned. And we made mushroom soup, so we supplemented our food.

*Did you ever hear other stories of people's relationships with German soldiers at any of the places along the way?*

Later on we had a German woman who was a lesbian and she did have affairs with one of the girls.

*What about the interpersonal relationship?*

They were not cruel. They didn't abuse us.

*Did it seem like there was a true hatred, or more that they were just doing their job?*

They were doing their job. I came across true hatred with the SS, but never regular German soldiers. The soldiers were drafted, but the SS, a lot of them volunteered. There was a big difference.

*So there was actually a romantic relationship too?*

Yes, that took place. We had this SS woman called Bubi, and she's the one who had the relationship. Dita comes from Vienna. I came from Germany, and all the others were Czech, basically from Prague. There was a woman with her three daughters who we called the Gabor Sisters who were beautiful, educated women. They all spoke German fluently because I think in Prague, the upper class spoke German. [Bubi had the relationship with one of them.]

Then we went from this village outside of Hamburg, and we stayed in Hamburg itself in the Freihafen, which was like a big warehouse near the river. We stayed in huge multi-level rooms, like a soldiers barrack but we were several stories above that, the five hundred of us in bunk beds. And we had prisoners, Italian prisoners of war, in the barracks next to us. This is where my friend Dita picked up Aldo. Aldo was an Italian prisoner of war, and he

got packages from the Italian Red Cross or something, and we had a line from his window to our window and he used to send stuff to us.

*Did you set up cans so you could talk to each other?*

Yeah. Well, we were able to talk by leaning out the window, but Dita decided to meet Aldo in the basement. Oh, there was a basement, and we had a lot of air raids, which meant we had to get up in the middle of the night and go down to the basement, and then get up at five in the morning to go back to work. Dita and I decided we were not going anymore, so we just hid in the bunks. But one day she decided she was going to meet Aldo, and they did meet, and I was standing guard. I mean, this was dangerous for both of them.

*You're a good friend!*

I know. But she made it okay.

After the war, Dita was a nurse in England and then came to Toronto and married a pathologist. When her neighbor in Toronto, who was Italian (Canadian but Italian), heard the story, she decided to find Aldo and did some research. She found him in Italy, so Dita went to meet him in Italy about two years ago. Actually it's written up in a book, which right now my daughter-in-law has. I'll let you read it. It's an unbelievable story.

*Is he still alive?*

Yes. My friend Dita died of ovarian cancer about a year and half ago, and I was with her in Toronto when she died. Look, I've been married, I've had children, and I don't think I've been as close to anyone as I've been to this woman in my whole life. We just stuck together and helped each other and shared everything.

So anyhow, we were in the Freihafen, and they expected an invasion from tanks from England, so we had to dig traps for tanks. Then, later on in about the end of '44, we were working on the streets in Hamburg to take bricks to be reused from bombed out buildings. Occasionally we found a cellar full of food in those bombed out buildings. We were prisoners, but we weren't that hungry then. You know, because we supplemented stuff. There was a German family that had a houseboat, and they left a bowl of porridge outside every morning. And if they had been caught, they would have been...

*At that point, how much did you know about what was going on in other parts of Europe?*

I didn't. But then we had all the bombings, and the more bombings we heard, the happier we were. We thought, "This is going to come to an end, it has to come to an end." And I never thought I'd not see my parents, I mean I was just counting on going home and having everything the way it was.

The older people got sick, some people died. We had snowstorms, and the old people were very upset about them. But we had a ball. We had no socks or shoes, so we put rags on our feet and went sliding down the hill. It depends on your age, you know. And as I said, I was with Dita and we were friends. And we never, ever decided that we would not get out of this. We always said, "This is what we're going to do when we get out." I of course thought I'd meet my parents, I mean, I didn't think about that. I didn't think they would die.

But then about a month before I was liberated, they decided to march us from Hamburg to Bergen-Belsen. That was the worst camp I'd been in. First of all, we had to walk, I don't

know how many miles it is, and it was in the winter because we were liberated in April. We were in Bergen-Belsen for a month, and we didn't have proper clothing or anything like that. There was no food and no water: nothing.

So we get to Bergen-Belsen and we come in and the dead are piled up as high as trees on each side of the road. We get a bunk with about eight to ten other young people, and every morning when we got up, the first thing we had to do was take the dead ones out and pile them on a thing. We had nothing to eat for the last week- no water, no nothing. But we heard the bombings. And then Bubi, the woman who had that affair with the Czech girl- who was beautiful by the way- she decided she's going to become a prisoner. She took off her SS uniform and put on a prisoner's dress.

*Why did she do that?*

Well how would you like to be an SS woman when you're liberated by the British? She didn't.

A lot of people died. That, I mean, really, that was... that was hell. That was real hell. But even then, I don't think we gave up.

*What do you attribute your survival mentality to?*

I think it was me. I wanted to get out of there. I didn't want to die.

So anyhow, we stayed on those bunks, we had no food. I drank some water from a puddle, and I got typhoid and was very sick, but the bombs were falling, so we were happy that it would be over soon. Finally we got this announcement that the British had liberated the camp and food would be coming. We got all this food and everybody got sick because we hadn't eaten. But then they set up stations for the sick to be taken care of, and by that time I couldn't even walk anymore, so I crawled over to a station. Now remember, I was very ill, but this is what I really think my will to live is: I got to the station, they asked me where I was born, and I said "Germany," and they said they don't take care of German people, even though I was Jewish. So I crawled back to my bunk, I turned around, went to another station, and I was Czech. You know... That must be a will to live.

I was in a barrack with French nuns, and I was unconscious for almost ten days or so. And then I remember waking up and I heard these little bells, and I remember saying, "No, no, no, I'm Jewish." These were the French nuns with the cross, and then I was out again.

*Was this still in the camp, or had they moved people?*

They built barracks for sick people. I had a bed and the French nuns took care of us.

*What else do you remember about the day the British came?*

I was so sick, I don't remember much. I was really ill.

*Did you understand and know that this was the end?*

Oh yeah, I knew that because of the food and all that. And all the SS people were gone. And we had all the SS people in Bergen-Belsen. You know, the soldiers ran. And the dead... they dropped like flies, every day it was... really they were piled up on each side of the road. I mean... just unbelievable. And it's amazing that we all didn't get sicker than we did. No showers, no water, no nothing.

And then, the Swedish Red Cross arrived. I was going to go home to Germany, but I was still very weak. The Swedish Red Cross was taking all youngsters under eighteen to Sweden to recuperate, and they said we will return you to your home when it's over. So I was talking to Dita, and she said, "go" because I was so weak I couldn't even walk. So I did go to Sweden, and we went to quarantine in Holz Bebrun, which was like a mountain resort: beautiful. And we stayed in these little cabins, and I met these two friends that I had known in Terezin.

*Did Dita go with you?*

No. Dita went to England because she had an aunt in England. I gradually recuperated and got better, and I gained some weight and all that. The place was contacted by a Mrs. Dandel, a woman who had volunteered as a Red Cross person when we came over by boat. She offered me to come and live with her in Stockholm. She was a principal at a girls' gymnasium, a school, so I did go because in the meantime I couldn't find my parents. The Red Cross was contacted and there was no sign of my parents anywhere. So I decided I'll go there and see what happens. I asked her how come she chose me, and she said she liked my smile. So you see, it's fate, isn't it?

*Did you start to hear stories about other people's experiences and where they had been during the war?*

We didn't talk about anything. I just didn't talk about it. This woman was Protestant, but she let me be, and she found Jewish people for me. She never asked of me anything- she just let me be. That's where I recovered, and I had my own little room, and she sent me to school, and she gave me private lessons, and she was just really good to me.

*How long were you there in Sweden?*

A little over two and a half years.

*How long did it take for you to start talking about your experiences?*

I never talked about it. I didn't even talk about it to my children.

*So this is only in very recent times?*

Well, I talked about it when they started asking questions. But when they were little and they said, "Mom?" [pointing to her number], and I said "This is my telephone number, so I don't forget it." I never talked about it. Now I don't know why, but I just didn't. Make believe it didn't happen. But my stay in Sweden made the difference in my life. The woman sent me to summer camp, and there was a school in the middle of an island in the North Sea, and it was just fantastic. You know, after all that. And I learned Swedish, which I forgot by now. And I took languages: I took English and German. And do you know that in my German, I was not good in grammar. It's funny. Then my relatives here found me, and they said I have to come to the United States.

*Who were the relatives?*

This is my mother's and father's siblings who got out in '38. One was in Argentina and all the others were in the United States- one in San Diego and the other ones in the New York

area. So I came over from Sweden on a boat in December with my skis. And they all had a heart attack. Here I come: a little suitcase and my skis!

*Were you excited to be coming, or were you sad to be leaving Sweden?*

I was coming and I was planning to go back to Sweden because in the meantime I had met a guy, a young man in Sweden. When I first arrived I lived with my uncle and aunt who decided to run my life when I had been on my own all those years. So I decided to go to Lake Placid as a waitress and I skied there for a whole winter. Then I came back and I moved into a furnished room and I worked in a button factory because that's all I could get. I thought I'd learn English, but everyone there spoke Spanish. And I went to city college at night.

*So how's your Spanish?*

Well I had enough problems with English.

*What year was it when you came to the US?*

I think it was 1948.

*So one thing led to another and you stayed?*

After I got back from Lake Placid I took classes and went to school at night. I took a job for a family who knew a friend of mine. The mother had a nervous breakdown and she had to go away for three months, so I was in New Rochelle taking care of the kids and they paid me quite well. And they had somebody there at night, so I could go to school. And then when the mother came back, I shared an apartment with this woman and through her I got a job at an advertising agency, Doyle Dane Bernbach. She was a secretary of Maxwell Dane and that's how I got started with that, and I loved it. I worked there for- well I took off for six years when my kids were little- but I worked there for thirty years.

*Were you still in contact with Dita this whole time?*

Oh, all the time. We went for each other's children's Bar Mitzvahs, children's births, weddings. I was her matron of honor. She was my, like a very, very close sister. And I was very upset when she died.

*Have you been back to Sweden?*

Oh in the beginning... the woman died now. But yes, she was there and I was here. That woman, she gave me back my life, really.

*What was it like going back there for you?*

I went back there and I was shocked because in my mind, everything was big. You know, because it was so great. And it turned out to be really not so. But this woman, she really did more for me than anyone can do for anyone. I mean, she never asked anything in return. She wasn't Jewish, and she never asked me to go to church and she made sure that I met Jewish people. And they were in the resistance in Sweden, so they're anti-Hitler, all the way. Very nice people. So that was luck. I mean you see how your life turns out? And I had nothing to do with that. She chose me.

*Do you believe there's some sort of guiding fate? Or that it's just random?*

No, I think that it's luck. I don't think there's anything guiding. I think that I was born, I'm going to die, and that's it. I have to die sooner or later, everybody has to die. But I used to be religious, and I lost that. From Auschwitz on that was gone.

*So your daughter works for a Jewish organization. There's obviously some sort of Jewish identity.*

We have a Jewish identity, but not a religious one.

*Can you talk about how you raised your children?*

My children didn't know anything about the Holocaust. They were brought up Jewish, but not a specific Jewish education. My son was Bar Mitzvah-ed, Jill was not Bat Mitzvah. We observe the traditional holidays. My ex-husband was very public oriented. So both my children work at not-for-profits. And now my granddaughters are also in not-for-profit, and one of my granddaughters is becoming a nurse practitioner. And she was in the Peace Corps for two years, so it's in the family.

*Was your ex-husband a survivor as well?*

No.

*What was that dynamic like?*

I don't think that was a problem. His mother always took my side. But I didn't talk about it. And the only contact I had was Dita. I mean, we were just so close, that we didn't talk about it either. The only thing is that if you had told me seventy years ago, that I would be here to celebrate my eighty-fifth birthday, I'd say you're nuts. But you see, I think it's my personality. I never was a pessimist. And I never gave up. The both of us- we were going to get out of the camp.

*When did you go back to Germany for the first time?*

The first time I went about twenty years ago. And about ten years ago my town had a reunion, Bielefeld, and I went with my son. And I went with Jill some other time. They both went back.

*What was it like to go back?*

I went back to Hellenthal, the little town I was born in. And I went to the cemetery to see my great-great grandmother's grave. The Jewish cemetery is intact. They're all very actively trying now to rectify the situation, I don't know what they're trying to do. In the town where my mother was born and where I used to spend my vacation, they named a street after my family just recently because they had been there for so many years. The family goes back in Germany all the way to the fifteenth or sixteenth century.

*When you go back, how do you feel about German people?*

It's a different time. These people were my age. They had nothing to do with it you know? I had two very good friends that are German and are not Jewish, three actually, and we all went skiing. They're all skiers. I don't have any animosity towards these people that are alive now. And you would think that the world learned. But nobody learned and look what's going on now in the Middle East and all that. It's just sickening. All these bombs and all these people are being killed. Unbelievable.

*Have you been to Israel?*

Oh several times. I worked in Israel. I had a friend of my son's from Washington who is an archaeologist and she went on a dig in Caesaria, and she asked me if I wanted to come and I went and worked there for three months. We were digging graves. They wanted to examine what people died of. And the religious Jews were all picketing, but the researchers returned the bones to the graves. They wanted to examine them.

*When was that?*

That was about maybe 20 years ago. Then every weekend I spent in Jerusalem. I found this German priest that had a small hospitality thing, and they rented out beds very cheap. It was in the Arab section and I stayed there. And when Jill came to Israel, she was appalled that I was staying there. I had to go through these gates and I was the only Caucasian, but I loved Caesaria and I loved Jerusalem. I had a friend from the camp who lives near Haifa in Tivon, and I visited her. She's also from Terezin, and we were in the youth camp together.

I have no complaints. The only complaint is that I suffered from terrible, terrible depression for many, many years. And I'm lucky that I got out of that. I take medication. That I think is the worst part of my life. Having lost my family so long ago, I don't even think of them anymore because I lost them when I was 16 or 17.

*When do think about them, do you think more about the earlier days in your life?*

No. The camp.

I used to only think about the camps, but recently I've thought more about my early childhood, my memories are coming back. On Sundays my father and I would go for walks, and he'd take me for ice cream and walk through the woods. And my parents taught me how to swim in the river. They just threw me in with a rope around my waist, and that's how I learned.

*What made you decide to participate in this Memoirs Project?*

They asked me. I said sure. I have no objections. How big is it?

*I'm not sure exactly, but we'll find out.*

There aren't that many survivors left.

*You didn't tell your family for a while. Have you told the story to other people like us?*

Yeah I talk about it now. I gave testimony in the Holocaust Museum in Washington. I'm in the archive there.

*Do you find that each time you tell the story, you remember different things?*

I don't remember the dates really. It's just that, when people tell me how terrible Terezin was, I said "Boy, you don't know how good you had it." You know?

*Do you find it hard to relate to people who left before the war?*

I don't even try. I like opera, so we talk about things like that.

*[break in the conversation]*

I was brought up as a small child in Germany, and I never encountered any anti-Semitism until maybe '38.

*Were you surrounded by non-Jews also?*

Non-Jews basically.

*So it wasn't just a Jewish community?*

No, my neighbors were not Jewish, and you know, when I was home and I couldn't do anything anymore- this was in Bielefeld. I wanted so badly to join the Hitler Jugend like all the others. I mean, you don't want to be left out because they all have so much fun. In my journey leaving Bielefeld, I was glad that I went. But again, I was a kid. If you had spoken to my parents, they would not have been happy.

Everybody is trying so hard now to put up memorials in all the towns and everything like that. My father who was one of eleven children, two of his brothers were killed fighting for Germany in World War I, and their names were taken off the memorial, and they were put back on. It's funny you know?

*What's your reaction to this move to make all these memorials?*

I think it's too late. I mean, I believe in kindness and giving while people are alive. I very strongly feel that. That's why I'm volunteering in the Alzheimer place and seeing my friend there. That's why I was so happy I was in Toronto when my friend died. Actually she waited for me to come. And now her husband who is on dialysis, he wasn't in the camp, he's going to be 89 in this August. I already said I'm coming for your birthday. Four of her children came to my birthday.

*Are her children all still Toronto?*

Yeah. Well in the vicinity.

*Do they look like her?*

Yeah. Her daughter does. Not the son. I think people should just do unto others as they want done unto themselves and then we'll just have a better world.